

# MILK RIVER WATERSHED NEWS

DECEMBER 1998  
VOLUME 1 NUMBER 3

**"We wish  
you all a  
very joyous  
and safe  
holiday  
season"**



## INSIDE

**Facts about the  
Glasgow  
Irrigation Project**  
page 2

**History of the  
Milk River  
Basin**  
page 3

## Local Residents Plan Milk River Workshop

by Paul Azevedo

**W**HAT IS THE MILK RIVER WATERSHED AND WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH YOUR WELL-BEING ALONG THE HI-LINE? Does water management in Glacier National Park, Alberta, or Saskatchewan impact your livelihood in Havre, Malta, or Glasgow? What is the status of tribal reserved water rights negotiations and the basin adjudication process? Are there opportunities for you and your neighbors to shape future water management within the Milk River basin?

You can learn the answers to these and other questions at an upcoming educational workshop entitled, "The Milk River: International Lifeline of the Hi-line." The workshop will be held on **Saturday January 30, 1999** from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the MSU-Northern Student Union Building located in Havre. The workshop is open to all U.S. and Canadian citizens interested in learning more about present and future management options in the Milk River watershed.

Planning for the workshop was initiated in early 1998 by a group of U.S. and Canadian watershed residents committed to the idea that watershed education is a critical first step in bringing together the diverse groups of water users that live, work, and recreate in the Milk River watershed. The goals of this workshop are to:

- Improve understanding and cooperation among various watershed users;
- Foster awareness of the interconnectedness of water supply, water quality, and water use from the headwaters to the mouth of the river near Nashua; and
- Raise awareness of and support for the public benefits of water projects.

Throughout the planning process, the organizers have stressed that the workshop is not meant to build consensus or resolve current water resource issues. Rather, they have worked toward developing an educational forum where individuals, groups, industries, and public bodies with stakes in the long-term vitality of the watershed would be encouraged to exchange information and to share their visions for the future of the basin.

One of the workshop highlights will be a "video tour" of the watershed produced by MSU-Bozeman. To capture a sense of the diversity and complexity of water uses and management issues within this truly international setting, the video production crew followed the Milk River from its headwaters in Glacier National Park to its confluence with the Missouri river just below Fort Peck Dam. Along the way they conducted interviews with irrigators, local business representatives, tribal representatives, recreationists, and water managers in Montana, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. Other workshop highlights include an historical overview of the watershed and a panel presentation made up of representatives of all the key water user groups in the basin. Workshop participants will also have the opportunity to discuss water management dilemmas with their neighbors on both sides of the border.

For more information, please see the workshop agenda and registration form inserted within this issue of the Milk River Watershed News. ■

# Facts about the Glasgow Irrigation Project

## Upcoming Events

**Saturday, January 30, 1999**  
Milk River Know Your Watershed Workshop  
Registration is at 9:30 AM  
Student Union Building, MSU-Northern -- Havre, Montana

For more information call:  
Montana Watercourse (406) 994-6671

DNRC Water Resources Havre Regional Office (406) 265-5516

DNRC Water Resources Glasgow Regional Office (406) 228-2561

## US Bureau of Reclamation

**January 11-15, 1999**  
Modern Methods in Canal Operation and Control  
Technical Service Center  
Denver, Colorado

**February 1-5, 1999**  
Water Management Workshop  
Denver, Colorado

**Mid to Late February**  
Flow Measurement Workshop  
Denver, Colorado

For more information call:  
Brent Esplin at (406) 247-7489

If you would like to contribute an article to this newsletter, have ideas or suggestions for improvements, or desire more information about these articles, please contact any member of the planning committee listed on the back page.

by Al Steiner

*Editor's Note: We plan to ask each division or district to provide the following information in upcoming newsletters. We appreciate the effort provided by Al Steiner and the Glasgow Irrigation District in putting this information together for us.*

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Total Acres:	18,011 acres
Number of farms:	106 farms
Water charge:	\$3.00 per acre-foot
Primary Diversion:	Vandalia Dam
Miles of canals, laterals:	Vandalia South Canal is 46 miles long.
Manager:	Allan Steiner
Board Member:	Melvin Novak Lee Cornwell John Lacey
Number of Employees	Full Time: 5 Part Time: 1

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE OPERATIONS OF THE GLASGOW IRRIGATION DISTRICT:

**Q: How does Glasgow Irrigation District charge water users?**

**A:** The district charges water users on an acre-foot basis. Ditch riders measure the water at the nearest delivery point each day using a Micrometer prop meter and log it on a water ticket. These tickets are delivered to the office and are logged with a statement of usage which is then sent to the user at the end of each month.

**Q: How are district taxes collected?**

**A:** The District sends an assessment list to the County Treasurer who includes the district assessment with the property tax assessment statements sent to the users. The treasurer's office collects the taxes and places the money in a the district's Operations and Maintenance (O&M) account.

**Q: What types of crops are grown within the district and approximate acreage for each?**

A: Barley	355.90 acres
Oats	112.40 acres
Wheat	3,736.79 acres
Alfalfa	5,368.88 acres
Other Hay	2,048.97 acres
Pasture	519.13 acres
Silage	552.40 acres
Other Forage	1,755.50 acres

**Question: How does the district ensure a fair distribution of water?**

**Answer:** Each user's water is measured on a daily basis and recorded. In a drought or water short year or when shortages in the basin are anticipated, the water is shut off when the total water allocated to an individual water user is reached. On non-water short years water is delivered on a demand and availability basis. Whether this method is equitable is hard to judge as the variety of crops grown in the district and the need and timing for water for each crop varies.

**Question: What is the District's policy when a user is observed wasting water and how is the policy enforced?**

**Answer:** At this point, there is no enforcement policy. The charge of \$3.00 per acre-foot basis is generally enough of an incentive not to waste water. However, politely pointing out the fact that a person is using more than his share of water is generally enough to stop the practice. We haven't noticed much water being wasted in the last couple of years.



Relining concrete section of initial reach of Vandalia Canal Diversion with R & B money. Photo on 3/2/92

**Question: Please give a brief discussion on the work that was performed under your Rehabilitation and Betterment (R&B) program?**

**Answer:** Some of the program accomplishments include:

1. Replaced 800 feet of concrete lining on the initial reach and installing a hydromet

station for measuring the water being diverted at Vandalia Dam.

2. A number of areas along the main canal and laterals were lined.
3. Drains were realigned and cleaned with a lift station installed in one drain to reclaim the drain water back into the system.
4. A siphon was installed and the length of canal which was labor intensive to maintain was removed.
5. Prefabricated concrete transitions were constructed making installation of turnouts faster and allowing for replacement of the majority of old leaking turnouts.
6. The purchase of some new equipment such as a drag line and a laser leveler was also made possible.

**Question:** *What tangible benefits came from the R&B program?*

**Answer:** A full-time secretary and other district office personnel were hired. These people are better able to look after the interests of the district by investing and accounting for its money, applying for grants, and, in general, gathering the information needed to allow the board of directors to do a better job of managing the district. A hydromet station was installed to monitor in-stream flows and diversions without having to travel to Vandalia Dam on a daily basis. The new turnouts make measuring the delivery of water to each water user easier and more consistent. The installation of canal liners decreased operational losses due to seepage and mitigated saline problems to the fields adjacent to the canal where seepage was prominent. The equipment purchased through the program is still improving the O&M of the district.

**Question:** *What are future plans and long term and short term goals of the district?*

**Answer:** At this point, the long-term goal is to rehabilitate Vandalia Dam. The dam was completed in 1917. The surface of the dam needs to be refaced to retain its integrity because of the effects of many freeze and thaw cycles over the years. The short-term goals would be to design and utilize existing structures to better measure water throughout the district and for collecting data necessary to determine what and where problems are in the system.

**Question:** *In a sentence, what changes would you like to see take place in the Milk River Basin in the next 10 years?*

**Answer:** I believe that the federal dams and project works and the resulting stored water is a benefit to more than the eight irrigation districts, and as such, other parties could possibly share more of the burden for maintaining these structures. ■

## History of the Milk River Basin

### Part 2

by Manson Bailey

INTRODUCED IN THE FIRST ARTICLE WERE THREE INDIVIDUALS THAT INFLUENCED IRRIGATION DEVELOPMENT IN THE MILK RIVER BASIN. They were: Theodore Roosevelt who established a ranch at Medora, N.D. in 1884; Big John Willis, a hunting guide at Thompson Falls during the same period; and H.H. Nelson, a large sheep rancher, earth moving contractor, and early irrigation planner from Cascade.

In 1886, "Teddy" Roosevelt saw a rocky mountain goat mounted in a taxidermist's window in North Dakota. When he inquired where it had come from, he was told that a hunting guide by the name of John Willis at Thompson Falls had shot it. Being an avid hunter, Roosevelt wrote to Willis requesting a guided goat hunt. John received the hand written letter on fancy stationary which was very hard to read. John had just finished guiding some easterners who couldn't climb a mountain or shoot straight, and he didn't know if he wanted to go out again so late in the fall. He turned Teddy's letter over and wrote on the back, "If you can't shoot any better than you can write, I don't think so." This letter now rests in the Roosevelt Memorial Museum in New York.

Finally, they made arrangements for the hunt. Roosevelt traveled by train across Montana with his ranch foreman who tended camp. Big John was there to meet them. Teddy climbed down from the train dressed in a corduroy knickers suit, squash hat, glasses, and a smile full of teeth. John

## Web Sites to Bookmark

The Internet is a huge information bank and finding what you are looking for can be time consuming and frustrating. Provided below is a list of web sites that relate to the Milk River Basin and Montana.

### United States Bureau of Reclamation Great Plains Region

[www.gp.usbr.gov](http://www.gp.usbr.gov)

This site contains information regarding USBR activities. Click on Water Supply Management to access Agri-met and Hydromet data.

### Natural Resource Information System

<http://nris.mt.gov>

This site contains hundreds of GIS maps that can be downloaded for free. This site also contains information on groundwater programs, the volunteer water monitoring program, and many additional links. More information is available per request, although, there may be a fee associated with it.

### United States Geological Survey

<http://montana.usgs.gov>

This site contains current stream conditions, various water use information and water reports.

### Montana Online

[www.mt.gov](http://www.mt.gov)

Provides access to information regarding State government, education, employment opportunities, education, and announcements.

### Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Home Page

[www.dnrc.state.mt.us](http://www.dnrc.state.mt.us)

Provides Access to various DNRC activities and information including grants and loans, water rights, news and events, and water resource information. The DNRC Water Resource Regional Offices have online computers available for public use.

### The Weather Channel Homepage

[www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)

Provides the latest weather forecasts for any city including current weather maps.

Happy surfing!

## Planning Committee

Bob Larson  
MT DNRC — Havre  
Water Resources Regional Office  
210 Sixth Avenue  
P.O. Box 1828  
Havre, MT 59501-1828  
(406)265-5516

Michael Dailey  
MT DNRC — Glasgow  
Water Resources Regional Office  
222 Sixth Street South  
P.O. Box 1269  
Glasgow, MT 59230-1269  
(406)228-2561

Kristi Kline  
City of Havre  
P.O. Box 231  
Havre, MT 59501  
(406)265-9031

Wallace Elliot  
Fort Belknap Irrigation District  
Rt. 71 — Box 38  
Chinook, MT 59523  
(406)357-3353

Dan Spencer  
Fort Belknap Indian Irrigation District  
Bureau of Indian Affairs  
P.O. Box 98  
Harlem, MT 59526  
(406)353-2905

Brent Esplin  
Bureau of Reclamation  
Montana Area Office  
2900 Fourth Avenue North  
P.O. Box 30137  
Billings, MT 59107-0137  
(406)247-7489

Malvin Novak  
Glasgow Irrigation District  
#15 Irrigation Street  
P.O. Box 271  
Glasgow, MT 59230  
(406)228-2346

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thought to himself, "I'll run him off the mountain in the first day" and was determined to do so. The little man had beautiful rifles and was a good conversationalist. John was tough on him during the hunt, but Teddy climbed as fast and hard as John and was able to shoot his goat. He won John Willis over as a friend and they hunted together at different times in Canada and other places. Both men were good for each other. It was said that John made a man out of Teddy, and Roosevelt refined Big John's demeanor. Teddy even introduced John to some good books.

U.S. history is full of the many accomplishments of Teddy Roosevelt. He led his Rough Riders up San Juan Hill in the Spanish-American War, and became Governor of New York, Vice President under President McKinley and then President of the United States when McKinley was assassinated on September 14, 1904. During this time, Big John Willis moved to Big Dry Creek southeast of Glasgow (now a part of the Big Dry Arm under Fort Peck Reservoir) and began ranching. On Roosevelt's presidential campaign trip around the country, he stopped in Helena and addressed the crowd from the back of the train. At the end of his speech he called out, "Is Big John Willis in the crowd?" John was there and he went up and greeted his old friend and reaffirmed their friendship.

It was during this time that the Reclamation Services, now the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, started to reclaim western

waters for irrigation development. There was a general perception in the U.S. Congress that water projects were critical for the settlement of the West. When John Willis arrived back in Glasgow from Helena, he told his friends that he had met with Teddy Roosevelt. The local water resource promoters were pleased. Partially because of his special relationship with Roosevelt, the Milk River Project was authorized by the Secretary of the Interior on March 4, 1903. In the Valley Country News, April 29, 1904, it states, "engineers arrived this week to start work near Dodson. This will be the beginning of the Milk River Irrigation System." In the same article, it states that one problem that must be solved before beginning the rest of the work is where to locate a dam on the Marias River. It was decided to adopt the Marias Diversion Project. The water from St. Marys Lake would be conveyed to a point on the Marias where a dam would be constructed. This stored water would then be diverted into Big Sandy Creek which empties into the Milk River at Havre. As we all know, this plan was never developed.

In the next installment, I will describe the important role H.H. Nelson played in developing the Milk River Project. ■

*[Correction Note: In the last issue it should have been 1891 (not 1881) when the first investigation began to assess ways to improve water supplies in the Milk River Basin.]*

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